

VII. INDUSTRY ADVISORY PANEL

Selection of the Industry Advisory Panel

Prior to implementation of sampling, an industry advisory panel composed of three representatives from the Galveston Bay shrimping community (approved by the Management Committee of the GBNEP) was convened to act as communication between fishermen and the investigators. Sampling design and methodologies were conveyed to the fishing community through this panel as well as by the principal investigators. Concerns or requests by the fishing community were considered without bias. The advisory panel also served to provide input regarding changes to sampling protocols and editorial review of quarterly and final reports. Panel members included Mr. Tom Hults, proprietor of a shrimp and seafood processing business; Mr. Terry Snider, owner and operator of a live-bait camp located on Galveston Bay and Mr. C. L. Standley, a commercial shrimp fisherman in Galveston Bay. All panel members had previously served on, or were active members of, other advisory panels which addressed fishery concerns in the Galveston Bay system.

Comments of the Industry Advisory Panel

1. The decreased levels of bycatch observed in samples taken from the West Bay fisherman with the "bottomless" net is not primarily due to utilization of a different gear type. The fishing techniques and area fished by that individual fisherman also contribute to low levels or reported bycatch³.
2. The 1992 study was completed in a manner which appeared to be as fair as possible (given resource limitations) to the shrimping industry while maintaining scientific integrity. However, use of additional vessels may have enhanced overall results with respect to characterizing bycatch composition and abundance.
3. Bycatch appeared to be higher than normal this year (higher percentage of the total catch and in greater numbers), primarily due to the large amount of rainfall in the spring.
4. Cutlassfish (*Trichiurus lepturus*) and hardhead catfish (*Arius felis*) were caught in greater numbers this year than in past years.
5. The high levels of rainfall and freshwater input into Galveston Bay during the last four years may have a cause-effect action on the populations (and ultimately trawl catch) some finfish, especially some species of catfish.
6. Sampling should continue for no less than 5 years to provide information on trends in abundance, distribution and composition of bycatch species.

³ Preliminary analysis of data from the 1992 study indicate that comparable levels of bycatch from tows in that portion of West Bay are observed.

7. Bycatch mortality is part of the ecological system and natural populations may cycle to account for this.
8. Predator-prey interactions and ecological niches of bycatch species are poorly defined and merit further investigation.
9. Stock assessment of individual bycatch species is unknown. Comprehensive examination of the size of total populations is necessary to determine what percentage of finfish (or invertebrates) are being captured or impacted (1%, 50%, 90%, etc.).
10. Does trawling help to minimize or regulate competitors/predators thus possibly providing some benefit to commercial or recreational fisheries? Further investigation is needed to determine the impact of trawling (and bycatch reduction) on each species as well as commercial and recreational fisheries.